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# FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF TEXASOLUMAR 24 AM 11: 55

ERK OF COURT

JONATHAN PIERCE
Plaintiff,

v.

S
CIVIL ACTION NO. CV - 193 - Y

THE CITY OF ARLINGTON;
POLICE CHIEF THERON
BROWN; DEPUTY POLICE
CHIEF JAMES HAWTHORNE;
and OFFICER D. VO
Defendants.

# PLAINTIFF'S ORIGINAL COMPLAINT

## TO THE HONORABLE JUDGE OF SAID COURT:

This is an action for monetary damages brought pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §§ 1983 and 1988, and the Fourth, Sixth, Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, and against Chief Theron Brown, Deputy Police Chief James Hawthorne, Office D. Vo and the City of Arlington.

I.

## **PARTIES**

- 1. Plaintiff is Jonathan Pierce.
- 2. Defendants are the City of Arlington, Chief Theron Brown, Deputy Police Chief James Hawthorne and Officer D. Vo.
- 3. Defendant City of Arlington may be served with process by serving Arlington City

- Mayor Robert Gluck at the Office of the Mayor & Council 101 W. Abram Street, Arlington, Texas 76004-0231.
- 4. Defendant Police Chief Theron Brown is an individual who may be served with process at his place of employment at the Ott Cribbs Public Safety Center, 620 W Division Street, Arlington, TX 76004-1065.
- 5. Defendant Deputy James Hawthorne is an individual who may be served with process at his place of employment at the Ott Cribbs Public Safety Center, 620 W Division Street, Arlington, TX 76004-1065.
- 6. Defendant D. Vo, Badge No. 2635, is a police officer with the City of Arlington who may be served with process by serving him at his place of employment the Ott Cribbs Public Safety Center, 620 W Division Street, Arlington, TX 76004-1065.

II.

# **JURISDICTION**

7. The Court has jurisdiction over this lawsuit because the action arises under Title 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331 and 1343.

III.

# **CONDITIONS PRECEDENT**

8. All conditions precedent have been performed by Plaintiff or have occurred.

IV.

## **FACTS**

## PLAINTIFF GOES TO SHOOT POOL WITH FRIENDS

- 9. On or about March 19, 2011, Plaintiff and his two friends, Daarian Cox and Parthenia

  Jessie Hodges went to play pool at Arlington's "Rack Daddy's."
- 10. While Cox and Hodges waited outside, Plaintiff entered the pool hall to retrieve money from an ATM inside to pay the entry fees for all three individuals. Plaintiff explained what he was doing to the security guard and door personnel and both allowed him to enter.
- 11. While Plaintiff went inside, Cox and Hodges waited outside.
- 12. Having retrieved the money from the ATM, Plaintiff then returned to the front of the building.
- 13. As he was exiting the front of the building, Plaintiff and the others then heard a loud bang and suddenly several people began running frantically toward Plaintiff.

## ARLINGTON POLICE PURSUE A WHITE MALE

- 14. Unbeknownst to Plaintiff, the Arlington Police Department had been pursuing a vehicle operated by Ronnie Lee Malone, Jr.
- 15. Alone in the vehicle, Malone entered the parking lot and slammed into a parked minivan. The violence of the collision caused patrons in the parking lot to run inside Rack Daddy's.

- 17. Malone is a white 26-year-old Caucasian who weighs approximately 200 pounds.
- 18. Plaintiff, an African-American Navy veteran, is 33-years-old and weighs approximately 131 pounds.
- 19. Malone was wearing shorts. Plaintiff was wearing jeans.
- 20. Malone was wearing a distinct light blue Orlando Magic basket ball jersey with the name Howard and the number 12.1
- 21. Plaintiff was wearing jeans, a white T-shirt underneath a signature dark green jersey of the Boston Celtics with the name Pierce and the number 34.<sup>2</sup>
- 22. Hodges, who remained outside, saw Officer Vo also emerge from his vehicle and chase Malone.
- 23. Like the other officers, Vo pursued Malone.
- 24. Hearing the noise and seeing the patrons run, Plaintiff moved back inside Rack Daddy's past the security guard and hostess. Other patrons then followed.
- 25. Vo, who had been pursuing Malone, inexplicably pursued Plaintiff past Cox and the security guard—both of whom yelled repeatedly to Defendant, "You are after the wrong person!"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> This is the jersey for Magic player Dwight Howard.
<sup>2</sup> This is the jersey for Celtics player Paul Pierce.

#### OFFICER VO SHOOTS PLAINTIFF WITHOUT CAUSE

- 26. Suddenly and without notice, Officer Vo shot Plaintiff in the back side with a Taser without probable cause.
- 27. At the time Plaintiff was shot in the back, he was unarmed and was neither resisting nor evading an arrest.
- 28. Plaintiff immediately fell to the ground.
- 29. Cox who drew and got down on his knees pled with Defendant Vo again, telling the officer again that he had the wrong individual.
- 30. "Get the fuck back," Vo yelled back at Cox. He tased Plaintiff again and yelled, "Get the fuck down. Get the fuck down. Stay down."
- 31. Vo then becomes defensive and belligerent with witnesses who continue to tell him that he has the wrong person.

## OFFICER VO TASES PLAINTIFF AGAIN WITHOUT CAUSE

- 32. While still more people are telling Vo that he has the wrong individual in custody, Vo tases Plaintiff again.
- 33. The officer yanks Plaintiff on to his stomach and places him in handcuffs.
- 34. Vo then drags Plaintiff outside where he confronts a crowd of citizens who tell him that he has the wrong individual and, by then, a group of Arlington Police officers who have Malone in custody.
- 35. Plaintiff is then placed on the ground for close to an hour while a crowd continues to tell the officers repeatedly that they had the wrong person in custody.

- 36. After approximately an hour, Plaintiff is finally released. Defendant Vo never identifies himself or offers any apology for shooting Plaintiff without probable cause.
- 37. The only explanation Defendant Vo made to Plaintiff was that he had told him to stop and that the officer actually touched him.
- 38. Plaintiff and other witnesses never heard Vo give Plaintiff any verbal warning or command. Likewise, no witness ever saw Defendant get close enough to touch Plaintiff.
- 39. Given the radical difference in physical descriptions between Malone and Plaintiff, Vo's representations that he was actually close enough to Plaintiff, before he tased him repeatedly, are incredible.

## TASERS AND DEADLY FORCE

- 40. According to Amnesty International, more than 351 people have died after being shocked by police Tasers since 2001. The group has urged law enforcement agencies to suspend Taser use pending more research on how the shock affects those who have medical problems such as a heart condition or who are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
- 41. One blog that follows tasers in the United Stat reports that there were 96 Taser-related deaths between January 2009 and September 2010. African-Americans—who represent only 12 percent of the national population—constituted 37 of those deaths, more than three times their representation in the larger population.<sup>4</sup>
- 42. These racial percentages correlate with the present case, as Malone, despite being the suspect of some offense, was not even tased by the other Arlington officers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See Suburban Hum, 96 Taser-Related Deaths in U.S. Since January (Sept. 5, 2009).

- 43. Tarrant County Sheriff Dee Anderson publicly stated in October, 2009 that his department does not use Tasers because he does not want to risk that one of his deputies might kill someone.
- 44. As has been explained by the manufacturer publicly and in civil rights and product liability litigation, TASER devices utilize compressed nitrogen to project two small probes up to various ranges at a speed of over 160 feet per second.<sup>5</sup> These probes are connected to the TASER device by insulated wires. An electrical signal of up to 50,000 volts is transmitted through the wires to where the probes make contact with the body or clothing, resulting in an immediate loss of the person's neuromuscular control and the ability to perform coordinated action for the duration of the impulse.
- 45. Because of their ability to cause severe pain and violently and suddenly seize individuals, the established consensus among Courts<sup>6</sup> and the law enforcement is that Tasers are considered, at least, an "intermediate" weapon on traditional use of force continuums.
- 46. In a 2005 report on the use of tasers in seven selected law enforcement agencies, the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) found that six of the seven agencies permitted taser use only when situations had reached the third ("Volatile") and fourth ("Harmful") levels of the five-level Federal Law Enforcement Training Center

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Bryan v. McPherson, 630 F.3d 805, 813 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2009)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Bryan, 630 F.3d at 811 citing Orsak v. Metro. Airports Comm'n, 675 F.Supp.2d 944, 957-59 (D.Minn.2009); Cyrus v. Town of Mukwonago, 2009 WL 1110413, at \*21 (E.D.Wis. April 24, 2009); Kaady v. City of Sandy, 2008 WL 5111101, at \*16 (D.Or. Nov.26, 2008); McDonald v. Pon, 2007 WL 4420936, at \*2 (W.D.Wash, Dec.14, 2007); Beaver v. City of Federal Way, 507 F.Supp.2d 1137, 1144 (W.D.Wash.2007); Parker v. City of South Portland, 2007 WL 1468658, at \*22 (D.Me. May 18, 2007); DeSalvo v. City of Collinsville, 2005 WL 2487829, at \*4 (S.D.III. Oct.7, 2005).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Bryan, 630 F.3d at 811 citing Safety and Injury Profile of Conducted Electrical Weapons Used by Law Enforcement Officers Against Criminal Suspects, Annals of Emerg. Medicine, April 2009, at 480.

- Use-of-Force Continuum.<sup>8</sup> "In other words," one court concluded, "these six agencies classified tasers as *intermediate* levels of force."<sup>9</sup>
- 47. Because Tasers constitute such an increase use of force, the law imposes a greater burden on the government to justify their use during arrests.<sup>10</sup>

## TASER MISUSE BY LOCAL POLICE

- 48. From 2004 to 2009, there have been five reported deaths<sup>11</sup>—one fatality each year—related to Taser usage by law enforcement in Tarrant County. Dallas has reported a similar history with one death occurring as recently as September, 2010.
- 49. In May, 2010, the City of Ft. Worth publicly settled the claims of the estate of African-American Michael Patrick Jacobs for \$2 million. In the Jacobs incident, the Tarrant County Medical Examiner determined that Jacobs had been shocked twice—once for 49 seconds and a second time for five seconds before he was killed. Following the death of Jacobs, another incident occurred in Ft. Worth where an officer tased an individual who was holding a child in a Wal-Mart.
- 50. Following the five separate taser-related deaths involving local police, local civil rights leaders repeatedly implored multiple police departments, including Arlington's, not to purchase anymore Tasers and to quit using the 50,000 volt weapons indiscriminately.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Bryan, citing GAO., Taser Weapons: Use of Tasers by Selected Law Enforcement Agencies, at 7-10 (May 2005). <sup>9</sup> Id.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Id.

November 2, 2004: Robert Guerrero, 21, Fort Worth, Texas

April 3, 2005: Eric Hammock, 43, Fort Worth, Texas June 24, 2005: Carolyn Daniels, 25, Fort Worth, Texas

August 23, 2006: Noah Lopez, 25, Fort Worth, Texas

April 18, 2009: Michael Jacobs Jr., 24, Fort Worth, Texas

- 51. In May, 2010, Arlington Police Chief Theron Brown publicly announced his intentions for his department to acquire an additional 300 Tasers. Despite the obvious risks of more generalized use, in the same public announcement, Arlington's Deputy Chief James Hawthorne said, the Police Department wants to have an electric-shock weapon available for every officer as standard equipment for its force of more than six hundred.
- 52. The City of Arlington, through its relevant law enforcement policymaker—the chief of police—has continued to endorse and promulgate policies and customs of use and training of indiscriminate use of Tasers when such force is excessive. As civil rights leaders have repeatedly informed the City of Arlington, the incidents involving Taser usage disproportionately have been used against members of the African-American community.
- 53. But for these acts and omissions of policy, custom, training and discipline, Plaintiffs rights under the Fourth, Sixth, Eighth and Fourteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution would not have been violated.

V.

# **CAUSES OF ACTION**

## **Count 1—Violation of Constitutional Rights**

54. The allegations contained in all of the paragraphs of this Original Complaint are hereby incorporated and realleged for all purposes and incorporated herein with the same force and effect as if set forth verbatim. Defendants exercise of these established policies and customs violated the Plaintiff's clearly established rights under the United States Constitution to

- a. freedom from unreasonable seizure of his person;
- b. freedom from the use of unreasonable, unnecessary, and excessive force;
- c. freedom from excessive use of a Taser;<sup>12</sup>
- d. the right to medical care for injuries received while in custody;

## Count 2—42 U.S.C § 1983 Against Individual Defendants

- 55. The allegations contained in all of the paragraphs of this Original Complaint are hereby incorporated and realleged for all purposes and incorporated herein with the same force and effect as if set forth verbatim. Defendant Vo and the City of Arlington's exercise of these established policies and customs violated the Plaintiff's clearly established rights under the United States Constitution to
  - a. freedom from unreasonable seizure of his person;
  - b. freedom from the use of unreasonable, unnecessary, and excessive force;
  - c. freedom from the use of deadly force; and
  - d. the right to medical care for injuries received while in custody;

## Count 3—42 U.S.C § 1983 Against Policymakers and the City of Arlington

56. Under controlling federal law, Chief Brown and Deputy Chief Hawthorne are policymakers for Arlington Police Department.<sup>13</sup> The policies of these two individuals—including acts and omissions, including hiring, training, disciplining, reprimanding and terminating officers, including Defendant Vo, as well as admitting errors<sup>14</sup> for officer and supervisor conduct—were a moving force that violated Plaintiff's clearly established

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> See Autin v. City of Baytown, 174 Appx. 183, 186 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2005); Priester v. City of Riviera Beach, 208 F.3d 919, 925 (11th Cir.2000).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Fraire v. City of Arlington, 957 F.2d 1268, 1279 n.45 (5th Cir. 1992).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> See Grandstaff v. City of Borger, 767 F.2d 161, 170-71 (5th Cir.1985).

rights under the United States Constitution to

- a. freedom from unreasonable seizure of his person;
- b. freedom from the use of unreasonable, unnecessary, and excessive force;
- c. freedom from the use of deadly force; and
- d. the right to medical care for injuries received while in custody;

## VI.

## **ACTUAL & EXEMPLARY DAMAGES**

- 57. As a consequence of Defendants' wrongful acts as described above, Plaintiff has suffered actual damages exceeding the minimum jurisdictional limits of this Court.
- 58. As a direct and proximate result of Defendants' acts and omissions as heretofore alleged, Plaintiff suffered physical impairment, excruciating pain, mental anguish and medical. Plaintiff is therefore entitled to recover all reasonable and necessary medical expenses. incurred that resulted from the acts of Defendants. In addition, Plaintiff has an action for the injuries suffered, including but not limited to the disfigurement, humiliation, past pain and suffering, mental anguish and physical capacity and loss of income suffered as a result of the incident.
- 59. Plaintiff seeks exemplary damages against Defendant Vo, who despite lacking probable cause to arrest Plaintiff, and who had been informed repeatedly and promptly by several individuals at the scene that he had seized the wrong person, continuously employed his Taser multiple times against Plaintiff.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup> See Autin v. City of Baytown, 174 Appx. 183, 186 (5<sup>th</sup> Cir. 2005); Priester v. City of Riviera Beach, 208 F.3d 919, 925 (11th Cir. 2000).

## VII.

# **ATTORNEYS' FEES**

60. Plaintiff are further entitled to receive her reasonable attorneys' fees pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1988.

## VIII.

# **INTEREST**

61. Plaintiff is further entitled to receive pre-judgment and post-judgment interest at the highest interest rates allowed by law.

IX.

# **JURY DEMAND**

92. Plaintiff demands a jury trial.

X.

# **CONCLUSION**

- 93. Plaintiff specifically reserves his right to bring additional causes of action against Defendants and to amend their Petition as necessary.
- 94. WHEREFORE, PREMISES CONSIDERED
  - (1) Actual and consequential damages as determined at a trial on the merits;
  - (2) Mental anguish damages;
  - (3) Punitive damages as determined at a trial on the merits;
  - (4) Cost of suit;
  - (5) Reasonable and necessary attorneys' and paralegals' fees;

- (6) Reasonable and necessary expert fees;
- (7) Pre-judgment and post-judgment interest at the maximum rate allowed by law;
- (8) Such other and further relief, general or special, at law or in equity, to which Plaintiff may be justly entitled.

Respectfully submitted,

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Rv

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State Bar No. 09465020

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SJS 44 (TXND Rev. 2/10)	CIVIL	COVER SHEET	RE	CEIVED TE
The JS 44 civil cover sheet an provided by local rules of counitiating the civil docket sheet	nd the information contained herein neither replace in the Indicated Conference of the Indicated Conference On the	nor supplement the filing and service of the United States in September 1 FORM.)	ce of pleadings or other papers of	Is required by law, except as selection of Court for the purpose of
I. (a) PLAINTIFFS JONATHAN PIERCE		DEFENDANTS THE CITY OF AI POLICE CHIEF	RLINGTON 28 HEM MINES JAMES HAWTHORNE;	TI TO WE
` '	e of First Listed Plaintiff DALLAS	County of Residence	of First Listed Defendant K	TARRANTA T
(E	EXCEPT IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES)		(IN U.S. PLAINTIFF CASES ID CONDEMNATION CASES, US INVOLVED.	·
(c) Attorney's (Firm Nam Geoff J. Henley, HENLEY Dallas, Texas 75206 (214	e, Address, and Telephone Number) & HENLEY, P.C., 2205 N. Henderson Av ) 821-0222	Attorneys (If Known)	1-11CV-	193-Y
II. BASIS OF JURISI	DICTION (Place an "X" in One Box Only)	III. CITIZENSHIP OF I	PRINCIPAL PARTIES	(Place an "X" in One Box for Plaintiff
1 U.S. Government Plaintiff	■ 3 Federal Question (U.S. Government Not a Party)	(For Diversity Cases Only)	TF DEF  I Incorporated or Pr  of Business In This	and One Box for Defendant)  PTF DEF incipal Place
☐ 2 U.S. Government Defendant	☐ 4 Diversity  (Indicate Citizenship of Parties in Item III)	Citizen of Another State	J 2	
W. NATURE OF SU		Citizen or Subject of a C Foreign Country	J 3	□ 6 □ 6
IV. NATURE OF SUI	T (Place an "X" in One Box Only) TORTS	FORFEITURE/PENALTY	BANKRUPTCY	OTHER STATUTES
☐ 110 Insurance ☐ 120 Marine ☐ 130 Miller Act ☐ 140 Negotiable Instrument ☐ 150 Recovery of Overpayment	Slander □ 368 Asbestos Person □ 330 Federal Employers' Liability □ 340 Marine Product Liability □ 345 Marine Product Liability □ 370 Other Fraud □ 350 Motor Vehicle □ 380 Other Personal □ 355 Motor Vehicle Product Liability □ 385 Property Damage □ 370 Product Liability □ 385 Property Damage	-   620 Other Food & Drug	422 Appeal 28 USC 158     423 Withdrawal 28 USC 157     PROPERTY RIGHTS     820 Copyrights     830 Patent     840 Trademark     SOCIAL SECURITY     861 HIA (1395ff)     862 Black Lung (923)     863 DIWC/DIWW (405(g))     864 SSID Title XVI     865 RSI (405(g))     FEDERAL TAX SUITS     870 Taxes (U.S. Plaintiff or Defendant)     871 IRS—Third Party 26 USC 7609	□ 400 State Reapportionment □ 410 Antitrust □ 430 Banks and Banking □ 450 Commerce □ 460 Deportation □ 470 Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations □ 480 Consumer Credit □ 490 Cable/Sat TV □ 810 Selective Service □ 850 Securities/Commodities/ Exchange □ 875 Customer Challenge 12 USC 3410 □ 890 Other Statutory Actions □ 891 Agricultural Acts □ 892 Economic Stabilization Act □ 893 Environmental Matters □ 894 Energy Allocation Act □ 895 Freedom of Information Act □ 900Appeal of Fee Determination Under Equal Access to Justice □ 950 Constitutionality of State Statutes
□ 2 Re	Cite the U.S. Civil Statute under which you a	Reopened anoth (specime filing (Do not cite jurisdiction	al statutes unless diversity):	Judgment Judgment
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:	Officer used excessive force (TASI)	NG multiple times) and arres N DEMAND\$	ted a completely innocen CHECK YES only i JURY DEMAND:	if demanded in complaint:
VIII. RELATED CAS PENDING OR CLOS	• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •			
DATE 03/24/2011	SIGNATURE OF	Axet Axecopy////////////////////////////////////	DOCKET NUMBER	

JUDGE -

MAG. JUDGE

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